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SUBJECT: CHINESE ACADEMICS ON AFGHANISTAN AND PAKISTAN

Classified By: Classified by Acting Minister-Counselor for
Political Affairs Ben Moeling. Reasons 1.4 B and D.

Summary

1. (C) Embassy contacts expressed cautious support for the new U.S. policy toward Afghanistan and Pakistan, though our interlocutors argued that the new strategy did not appropriately address the Kashmir issue. They were suspicious of long-term U.S. intentions in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Citing China's "foreign policy principle" of noninterference, contacts expressed discomfort with PRC involvement in NATO-led security operations, stating that China could only step up security cooperation under a UN framework. A number of scholars stated that high-profile cooperation with the United States, such as participation in a route for non-lethal supplies to Afghanistan, would alienate Muslim Uighurs in China's far west and increase the likelihood that Chinese would be targets of terrorism. Contacts cited instability and security concerns as principal reasons Chinese companies have not invested in the region on a wider scale. End summary.

Cautiously Positive Reaction to the New Policy

2. (C) At a roundtable discussion at the Embassy on April 9, a group of Afghanistan/Pakistan experts that included think tank academics, a Chinese mining company official and two representatives from the Afghan Embassy expressed cautious support for the new U.S. Policy for Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Li Li, a scholar from the Ministry of State Security-affiliated China Institutes for Contemporary International Relations (CICIR), said President Obama's strategy in Afghanistan and Pakistan was "pragmatic," because it integrated economic development and a troop surge. China Institute of International Studies (CIIS) South Asia scholar Zheng Ruixiang said he agreed with the Obama Administration's view of the challenges, particularly the emphasis on economic growth and engagement with other regional players. Afghanistan Embassy First Secretary Mirwais Nab liked that the strategy called for challenging Taliban sanctuaries on both sides of the border and engaging regional actors.

"AfPak" and Kashmir

3. (C) CICIR's Li noted that the new U.S. strategy treated Afghanistan and Pakistan collectively, citing the term "AfPak," but she noted (and other participants agreed) that China had not yet made this formal linkage. Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) scholar Ye Hailin noted that China's academic community views each country as separate and distinct, and in fact scholars working on each country work in different departments: Pakistan is covered in South Asia

while Afghanistan is covered in Central Asia. CICIR's Fang Jinying, on the other hand, argued that linking the two countries is a mistake, and that China should work with each country bilaterally and not allow influences from one to impact strategies in another.

¶4. (C) Contacts also argued that the new U.S. strategy did not adequately address the Kashmir issue. Referencing then-candidate Barack Obama's comments of October 2008, CICIR's Fang said the road to peace runs through Kashmir. CICIR's Li indicated Pakistan has a "problem of focus" because of Kashmir, and as long as the dispute persisted, she said, "real action" would be difficult. Li said India wanted no third party to intervene in the Kashmir issue, and neither the United States nor China could persuade India to move forward on a solution.

Questions about U.S. Intentions

¶5. (C) Our interlocutors were suspicious of long-term U.S. intentions in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Asked about the likelihood of China participating in security operations at some point in Afghanistan, Tsinghua University Professor Liu Libin replied, "without knowing your strategic end goal, we're not going to just jump into it." CICIR's Li Li also remarked that the U.S. goals remain unclear, which aroused China's suspicions. CICIR scholar Fang went a step further, raising the possibility that U.S. efforts in Afghanistan were part of a larger plan to contain China. Some Chinese think the United States wants to destabilize the region if it

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cannot dominate the region, Fang said.

¶6. (C) Citing anti-China voices in the United States and recent U.S.-China confrontations in the South China Sea, CICIR's Fang questioned whether U.S.-China mutual trust has reached an appropriate level for greater cooperation in Afghanistan and Pakistan. To increase mutual trust, she suggested that Afghanistan and Pakistan be issues in the U.S.-China Strategic and Economic Dialogue.

Noninterference and UN Auspices

¶7. (C) Some academic contacts expressed discomfort with the idea of PRC involvement in a NATO-led security operation, citing China's long-held foreign policy principle of noninterference, which CICIR's Fang called a "time-tested policy to keep good relations." Tsinghua's Liu added that China accepted "interference" in other countries for humanitarian purposes only under the auspices of the United Nations. Under the current arrangement in Afghanistan, Liu continued, there is "little flexibility" for China to support ongoing coalition military and security operations. CASS's Ye stated that China should re-think this policy, based on its growing set of national interests but acknowledged that the Chinese government would probably continue to avoid any direct participation in security operations as long as they were not under UN auspices.

¶8. (C) Several scholars stated that China supported a leading role for the UN in Afghanistan and that increased Chinese security cooperation on Afghanistan could only be stepped up within a UN framework. The current "characteristics" of a U.S. and NATO-led effort did not lend themselves to China's participation, CICIR's Fang said, adding that China could cooperate in a UN-led military effort agreed upon by "all relevant parties." Referring to the U.S. proposal for Chinese participation in a supply route to Afghanistan for non-lethal equipment, CASS's Ye said agreeing to the U.S. request would be difficult without a UN resolution. Fang said allowing the route would be "impossible" as long as the military effort in Afghanistan was U.S. or NATO-led.

¶9. (C) Contacts suggested that high-profile cooperation with the United States in Afghanistan would alienate Muslim Uighurs in China's far west and put Chinese in Pakistan and Afghanistan at greater risk for becoming targets of terrorism. "We must avoid talibanization (in Xinjiang)," CASS' Ye said, adding that China's support for coalition efforts could also stir up problems with local militias and the Taliban in Afghanistan and Pakistan that currently do not target China.

Shanghai Cooperation Organization

¶10. (C) Asked whether China would assist Afghanistan under the framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), contacts noted that the SCO was not currently in a position to make significant contributions. "The SCO is not NATO," said CASS's Ye. "It's a big family, not an army or military bloc, and brothers don't always agree." Ye added that SCO member nations were "a long way" from a common SCO defense policy but suggested that the SCO, NATO, and U.S. Government exchange ideas on Afghanistan.

Development Assistance

¶11. (C) Chinese contacts cited instability and security concerns in Afghanistan and Pakistan as principal reasons Chinese companies had not invested in the region on a wider scale. CICIR's Fang said that while some companies, such as Huawei and ZTE, had begun work on reconstruction projects, the large state-owned enterprises were waiting on improved security conditions before making significant investments. She emphasized that China increasingly focused on training and institution-building in its foreign projects, which could be utilized to improve relations beyond simple economic transactions.

¶12. (C) CASS's Ye reiterated that Chinese investment in Afghanistan was contingent upon improved security, adding that China was already making efforts to decrease trade

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imbalances between China and its two neighbors by increasing imports from both countries, but that production, both the type of goods and their quantity, limited how much China could feasibly purchase. Ye continued that China was looking to expand telecommunications and construction projects in the region, with contracts stipulating the local proportion of the workforce. He said that, in the past, importing Chinese workers for similar projects was more effective because the labor was cheaper and the workers "took orders well." Currently, however, Chinese workers had become more expensive relative to local labor, and hosting Chinese workers in large numbers in the region presented numerous security issues that could be at least partially resolved by hiring local workers.

¶13. (C) CICIR's Li noted the domestic political difficulty China's government faced when providing aid overseas. While China wanted to provide aid to Afghanistan, it must convince Chinese citizens that aid is warranted. Since many Chinese citizens were poor and in need of government assistance themselves, she said, the Chinese government could face difficulty justifying significant aid increases while facing so many of its own social problems.

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